



CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

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State Superintendent of
Public Instruction

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September 2, 2005

Dear Superintendents:

As we watch and read about the suffering of our fellow Americans, I know you join me in offering heartfelt compassion and sympathy to the people of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama as they deal with what may be the worst disaster in our country's history.

I have heard from many of you who have asked how your district can help with the relief efforts and specifically how we can help the children from the evacuated areas. I want to thank you for your offers of help and let you know that the California Department of Education will be coordinating efforts to help get children in evacuated areas back into school as soon as possible.

HUMANITARIAN RELIEF

First and foremost, all of us can help our fellow Americans in this crisis by donating to the Red Cross to support the humanitarian relief efforts. I urge you to share the number for the American Red Cross's toll-free donation line with all of your schools and staff: 1-800-435-7669 (1-800-Help-Now).

I also encourage students who would like to offer assistance to victims of this disaster to participate in a campaign I'm starting called, "*California Kids Care*" to collect pennies (and more) for the disaster relief effort. *California Kids Care* is a voluntary effort to encourage California public school students to get involved in helping the victims and their families by collecting money and sending it to the American Red Cross. Participating schools will receive recognition by the State, and we will announce the total funds raised by California schools at the end of the fundraising drive. Please see the attached *California Kids Care* fact sheet and Collection Response Form.

We also know that there may be a critical need for school supplies for students living in evacuation centers in other states. I will provide additional information about what the California education community can do to help provide supplies to these students in coming days.

ASSISTING STUDENTS ARRIVING FROM EVACUATED AREAS

Secondly, some California schools have already reported the arrival of students who have been made homeless as a result of hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. We welcome those students with open arms. As children from the devastated areas arrive at your schools, I would like to remind you that the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Act requires immediate enrollment of students who are homeless, including those made homeless by natural disaster. These students do not need to provide proof of residency, immunization records, school records or legal guardianship papers to enroll and attend school.

It is likely that school records for these students will have been destroyed or will be delayed at best. As a state we will make every effort to place and serve these students based on information provided by the student, family or friends.

Once the students are enrolled, California school immunization law allows schools to give students who are transferring in from other states up to 30 days to produce their immunization records. Districts should work with their local county health agencies to assist families to obtain immunizations records and/or immunizations for those students who are identified as needing additional immunizations.

School districts must also track students they admit without proof of immunization so that those children can be protected in case of an outbreak of any vaccine-covered disease; and follow-up is facilitated on those children who need to eventually show proof of vaccination. The California Department of Education will work with the California Department of Health Services Immunization Branch to determine any necessary next steps.

If a local school system begins receiving a large number of students from the affected areas, it might also be expedient to have a central intake point with access to all of the services available within your schools. But whether this is at a central location or each school will be receiving these students, the following resources should be made available:

- Pupil Personnel Workers (PPW)—These specialists can facilitate contact with other community services such as you county health department and your county Department of Social Services.
- School guidance and Counseling—School based counselors can expedite enrollment and assist with contacting home schools (where possible.)

- School Health Providers—School nurses are able to assess possible health care needs and refer to your county health department as necessary.
- Psychological Services—If any of the students require more in depth psychological services, the School Psychologists can make referrals.

Homeless students have the right to participate fully in all school activities and programs and qualify automatically for student nutrition programs. For a list of resources for assisting homeless children, please see the California Department of Education Web site at: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/cy/>

I also encourage you to work with your district's homeless liaison to provide assistance as needed to the children coming to our state from the disaster affected areas. A list of the liaisons for county and each district in our state can be found here: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/mv/contacts.asp>.

We will need to be cognizant of the needs of all of our students related to the national disaster in the coming weeks. In addition to newly arrived victims, our schools serve students with relatives who have been affected by the national disaster. Our students have witnessed the tragic aftermath of this disaster. They will need our help. I encourage your schools to work with local mental health and public health officials to assist these students in any way possible.

As we assess the financial impact on California of providing educational services to students arriving as a result of Katrina, I will work with the Governor and Legislature to provide additional resources for districts to mitigate any fiscal impact. Additionally, as we monitor the number of evacuated students arriving and attending school in California, I will also seek donations from corporate partners to provide school supplies, school uniforms, textbooks and other basic necessities as needed here in California.

Lastly, some of you have led your district through times of crisis involving a natural disaster, like the Loma Prieta earthquake or Northridge earthquake or wild fires. I ask you to share what you have learned so we can offer best practices to our colleagues in the affected areas. Please e-mail tips that you found were effective to help students through the disaster and get back on track in school; tips for parents of students; and tips for recovery from a school district point of view to communications@cde.ca.gov.

I know we are united in sorrow for the ordeal that our fellow Americans are experiencing. I want you to know that I will continue to coordinate with the Governor's office, the Federal Department of Education and my colleagues in the affected states to provide you with the latest educational related information and the best ways to help.

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Thank you for joining me and others in the California school community in offering what comfort we can to our counterparts in this time of most desperate need.

Sincerely,

Jack O'Connell

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